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A Visit To Louise Lateau.

By

Gerald Molloy, D.D.

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COTTAGE OF LOUISE LATEAU.

a. Room recently added for Louise.

See page 17.

A VISIT TO LOUISE LATEAU

IN THE SUMMER OF 1872

With a Short Account of her Life

AND A DESCRIPTION OF

HER STIGMAS AND HER ECSTASY.

BY THE REV.

GERALD MOLLOY, D.D.,

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY IN THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF ST. PATRICK, MAYNOOTH.



"Opera autem Dei revelare et confiteri honorificum est."
Tobias, xii., 7.

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210. m. 39.

The Work, if so it may be called, is divided into Three Parts. In the First Part, I tell the story of my own visit to Louise. In the Second, I give a sketch of her life, with an exact description of her Stigmas and her Ecstasy, from a medical point of view. The Third Part goes to show, by an accumulation of evidence which seems to leave no room for reasonable doubt, that these extraordinary phenomena are genuine wonders and not the work of fraud.

If these pages should chance to come under the notice of those whose devotion to Natural Science has drawn them away from all belief in the supernatural order of things, a class unhappily very numerous in this our enlightened nineteenth century, I would

only ask them to be consistent with their own principles. Loyalty to facts, especially to those facts that we learn from the senses, is one of their most cherished maxims. This is what they prize most in themselves, as the characteristic of a truly scientific mind: this is what they chiefly claim from others, in regard to their own discoveries. I ask of them nothing more in the case of Louise Lateau.

They have not been slow to rebuke a certain Theological bigotry, which, as they fancy, is blind to all facts that seem to come into collision with preconceived views and opinions. I will not say that their censure has been always undeserved. But I would remind them, that there may be a bigotry of scientific scepticism, as well as a bigotry of

religious zeal: and I would express a hope that they will not themselves commit the error they have reprobated in others; but rather come to consider the facts that are here set forth, in that fair and candid spirit which they would desire in a Theologian, if he ventured to discuss the significance of a Chipped Flint or a Fossil Skeleton.

G. M.

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.
January 6, 1873.

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month of August last, I reached this unattractive, noisy, place; and spent a somewhat uncomfortable night, disturbed as I was, ever and anon, by the heavy rumbling of the coal waggons, and the shrill whistling of the engines.

I was up betimes in the morning, and set out from the village inn soon after five o'clock, to make my way to the hamlet of Bois d'Haine, which, as I was told, was distant about twenty minutes walk. After following the high road for not quite half a mile, I met some peasants going to their work; and asking my way, they showed me a path to the right, which led along through pleasant meadows and corn-fields, straight to the door of the Curé's house at Bois d'Haine.

This little hamlet, embosomed in the undulations of a rich and smiling country, is the very ideal of picturesque beauty and primitive simplicity. There are no regular streets, no long rows of houses; but a couple of hundred rustic cottages are scattered about, amid shady orchards and fragrant gardens. The inhabitants, chiefly

devoted to agriculture, have most of the comforts, without any of the luxuries, of life. There is little wealth amongst them, and but scanty learning: they are ignorant or heedless of modern improvements: and, free from ambition and from care, they pass their lives in humble, contented, obscurity.

But it was not to admire picturesque scenery, or rustic simplicity of manners, that I had come to the hamlet of Bois d'Haine. The story had gone about that, near to this tranquil and secluded spot, a peasant girl, by name Louise Lateau, had for four years borne on her hands and feet and side, the Stigmas of our Lord's Passion; that from these Stigmas, blood flowed copiously on the Friday of each successive week, while, at the same time, around her head, was developed a coronet of bleeding points, representing the crown of thorns. Further, it was said that every Friday, for several hours together, she was rapt in an Ecstasy, during which she became completely insensible to all material objects, and wholly absorbed in the contempla-

tion of the Divine Passion, the various scenes of which were vividly present to her mind, as in a vision. This story I had read, from time to time, variously told, in newspapers and magazines, and now I was come to the place itself, in the hope that I might be able to see, with my own eyes, so striking and wonderful a prodigy.

It was exactly a quarter to six o'clock when I reached the Curé's house. The outer door was opened directly I pulled the bell, and I found him walking in his garden. He told me it was not allowed to every one to see Louise, but only to very few, and that none were admitted except on a written application, made some weeks beforehand. After a little conversation, however, he kindly agreed to relax the rule in my favour; and, as this was Friday, he proposed I should come down to his house between twelve and one o'clock, when I might go with him to see her in her Ecstasy.

In the meantime we had reached the little church where he was about to say Mass. Three

or four priests were already there, who had come, like myself, from a distance, to see the Ecstatica. I found, on inquiry, they were now going direct to her house, to give her Holy Communion. It is her practice to receive Communion daily. On all other days she comes to the church, like the rest of the faithful. But on Fridays she cannot come, on account of the bleeding: and so, by a special privilege, the Blessed Sacrament is carried to her house. I asked the Curé's permission to accompany the procession; and we set out just as the bell for six o'clock Mass had ceased to toll.

The Sacristan of the church went first, bearing a lighted torch enclosed within an ornamental lantern. Next, in soutane and surplice and stole, followed the priest who carried the Blessed Sacrament. Then came three other priests and myself. We took a path through the fields, the same by which I had come to the hamlet, half an hour before. As we wound our way along, the sun burst out through a thin veil of cloud that hung in the eastern sky, the dew glistened

on the grass, and a light wind rustled through the ears of corn.

Emerging, after a few minutes, from the path, we came on a sort of bridle road, and passed some scattered houses. There were peasant children playing in the way; there were busy housewives sweeping out their houses; there were listless idlers attracted to the doorsteps, to see the procession go by: and all knelt down to adore the Blessed Sacrament as it passed.

Then we came to a level crossing on the railway—a branch line from Manage, which penetrates into the heart of the coal country. A long train of coal waggons was coming up, and we had to wait for a minute or two. The engine-driver and the stoker raised their caps as they hurried by: and the man in charge of the gate, fell on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament, while, at the same time, he held up his white flag to the train. The house of Louise Lateau was now in sight, about two hundred yards beyond the level crossing, and just half a mile from the parish church of Bois d'Haine.

It is a small whitewashed cottage, standing by the roadside; unpretending in appearance, but singularly neat and well kept. As we came near, the door was noiselessly opened from within. We passed first into a room of moderate dimensions, which answers the double purpose of kitchen and work-room; for the family is poor, an aged mother and her three daughters having scarcely any means of support but what they earn by the work of their own hands. A sewing machine stood on a deal table at one side; and the walls, beautifully white and clean, were adorned here and there with pious pictures.

The next room, of smaller size, seemed to be the sleeping apartment of the family. In it was one of the sisters, kneeling in prayer. Directly before her was an open door; and through this door we passed into the room of Louise. This room, about ten feet square, is a recent addition to the house. It was built for Louise, after the weekly recurrence of the bleeding and the Ecstasy was fully established: for it was found desirable to give her a place of retirement, where

she might remain undisturbed herself, and where she would not interfere with the routine of domestic work.

In this little sanctuary every thing was exquisitely neat and simple. Before us, a very small table, decorated with artificial flowers, and bright with burning tapers, was covered with a linen cloth of snowy whiteness, to receive the Blessed Sacrament. On the right, at the back of the door, was a tiny bed, carefully made-up for the day, and at the foot of the bed was Louise herself upon her knees. She is twenty-two years of age, rather under the middle height, and somewhat plain in appearance. As she knelt there, waiting to receive Communion, her face bore a certain expression of sadness, but was not, by any means, melancholy or care-worn. Her dress, in perfect harmony with everything around, was simple and unpretending.

Over her hands was spread out a long linen cloth, which she held up under her chin. Another of the same kind, saturated with blood,

was on the bed close by, as if it had been changed for a fresh one just before we came in: beside it were lying her beads. The blood stood out in drops on her forehead, which looked as if scratched and torn; and, further back, it could be seen oozing out through her hair, under her modest little white cap. She remained perfectly motionless, and never raised her eyes. After receiving Communion she took a little water from the hand of the priest. The ceremony lasted altogether, from the time we entered the room, about three or four minutes; and before it was ended, the blood, which had been accumulating every moment on her forehead, was flowing down over her face in three separate streams.

When we came back to the Church, the Curé was finishing his Mass, in the presence of a large peasant congregation. As there were two altars, we had an opportunity of saying Mass, too, without much delay; and afterwards, the Curé invited us all to breakfast. I eagerly accepted the invitation, hoping to hear, from an

authentic source, an exact account of the extraordinary phenomena manifested in Louise, and to learn, perhaps, some interesting details of her life.

But I was doomed to disappointment. The worthy Curé was not communicative: it was only with reluctance he would speak about Louise at all; and he seemed rather disposed to rebuke our curiosity than to gratify it. One thing, indeed, came out, which was new to me, that Louise had eaten nothing since last March twelvemonth. But even this fact was drawn from him with difficulty, and he spoke of it without any expression of admiration or surprise.

It seemed as if the good Curé had been so long accustomed to supernatural wonders in the person of Louise Lateau, that they have ceased to be wonders for him. As Saint Augustine says, it is not what is really most wonderful that strikes us most, but rather what is rare. The countless marvels of the earth and of the heavens pass before our eyes, day after day, and

we make but little account of them; so, too, it would seem that those in daily intercourse with Louise, have grown so familiar with the prodigies which God has wrought in her, that the feeling of wonder has passed away, and they would now be more surprised at the cessation of these prodigies than they are at their continuance.

We learned, during breakfast, that Louise usually passes into her Ecstasy between nine and ten o'clock on Friday morning, and comes out of it about five in the afternoon. As she is very unwilling to be made an object of exhibition, visitors are not admitted until after the Ecstasy has begun, and they must leave before it is over. By this arrangement she is spared all confusion and embarrassment: for while the Ecstasy lasts, she is completely unconscious of what is going on around her. Accordingly, when we were taking our leave after breakfast, the Curé directed us to return at half past twelve, and engaged to come with us himself to the house of the Ecstatica.

CHAPTER II.

LOUISE IN HER ECSTASY.

CROWD OF VISITORS—DIFFICULTIES OF THE CURÉ—SECOND VISIT TO THE COTTAGE—DESCRIPTION OF LOUISE IN ECSTASY—VESPERS READ—EFFECT UPON LOUISE—THE BLEEDING STIGMAS VISIBLE—THE PROSTRATION—STRIKING CHANGE AT THREE O'CLOCK—DEPARTURE.

I CAME punctually at the time appointed. The other priests had already arrived. But there was a varied crowd of visitors besides, assembled in the hall and parlour of the Curé's house, who had come, not only from the neighbouring provinces of Belgium, but from distant parts of France, and England, and America.

It was a troublesome and unpleasant task for the poor Curé to meet them all: to listen to their several stories, to hear their urgent petitions, and yet to refuse what they sought for so earnestly. He was firm, however, though gentle. He told them he had long ago promised admission to as many as the room could hold;

that those who had got his promise were already waiting for him at the house of Louise, and that it would be unfair to exclude them now, at the last moment, in order to make room for others, who had come late, and who had made no previous application.

We set out at length, and in a few minutes reached the house. Here we encountered another crowd, of perhaps forty people, many of whom had come without any arrangement with the Curé, in the vague hope of obtaining admission. Then followed the same unpleasant scene we had already witnessed, of expostulation and entreaty. In the end, the Curé, who acted with great tact, and a certain blunt courtesy, succeeded in getting together those whose claim he recognised, and arranging them close to the door of the house. He then tapped lightly at the window. The door was opened in a moment. We entered, to the number of about five and twenty, and the door was closed again.

Louise was alone in the inner room. She was

seated on a chair at the foot of her bed, in the same place where she had knelt to receive Communion in the morning. Her body was bent slightly forward; her hands rested on her lap, and were covered with a linen cloth, deeply stained with blood; her face, partly turned round towards her right shoulder, was directed upwards; her eyes, full of expression, were wide open, and seemed to be fixed on some object that absorbed all her thoughts; her whole attitude suggested the idea of eager and earnest attention.

Though five and twenty people had, all at once, come into the little room, with a sort of rush, the Ecstatic girl never stirred; her eyes were never for a moment diverted from the object on which they seemed to be immovably fixed; nor did she appear, in the least degree, conscious that her solitude had been suddenly invaded by an intensely eager, though reverent and awe-stricken, crowd.

There were four or five priests in the room. At a signal from the Curé, they took out their

Breviaries, and began to read aloud the Vespers of the day. It was the Eve of St. Laurence, Martyr. As soon as the first murmurs of prayer were heard, the countenance of Louise seemed to be suddenly lit up with an expression of innocent delight. It was no longer plain, but beautiful and attractive.

At intervals, a sweet smile played across her features, and her eyes beamed with a more brilliant lustre. This was always the case at the Gloria Patri, and at the Ave Maria. But a more striking change came with the first verse of the Magnificat. The movement of her features betokened especial emotion; she started with a sudden thrill of joy, and her hands, at the same moment, rose up from her knees, where they had before rested, into an attitude partly of wonder, partly of adoration.

By this last movement the cloth that had covered her hands was thrown off, and the Stigmas became visible. At first they were somewhat concealed by the blood, which was slowly oozing through the skin. But some pious people, see-

ing that a favourable moment had arrived for getting a relic of this extraordinary scene, began to apply white handkerchiefs and linen cloths to the bleeding marks; and in a few moments all the blood was wiped away.

The nature of the Stigmas was then more distinctly seen. They are oval marks of a bright-red hue, appearing on the back and palm of each hand, about the centre. Speaking roughly, each Stigma is about an inch in length, and somewhat more than half an inch in breadth. There is no wound, properly so called, but the blood seemed to force its way through the unbroken skin.

In a very short time, sufficient blood had flowed again to gratify the devotion of other pilgrims, who applied their handkerchiefs, as had been done before, until all the blood had been wiped away a second time. This process was repeated several times during the course of our visit. It has been remarked, however, that the blood does not usually flow so fast during the time of Ecstasy as it does before and after.

When Vespers were ended, the countenance of Louise subsided into an expression of greater repose, such as it had worn when we first came into the room; but her hands still remained extended in the attitude of earnest prayer. No very remarkable change took place until twenty minutes to three o'clock. Some new and startling vision seemed then to arrest her attention: an emotion of painful anxiety flitted across her face: she rose up somewhat in her chair, but without leaving the sitting posture, and the next moment she fell forwards on the floor, her head coming gently into contact with the ground. There was something very peculiar about this fall. It was not accomplished, apparently, by a regular series of muscular efforts, but rather by one continuous uniform movement; and though the fall was quite sudden, there was no shock, the body reaching the ground with the lightness almost, and the softness of a sponge.

The Rosary was now said, also the Litany of the Saints, the Salve Regina, and some other prayers. No visible effect was produced upon

Louise, except that during the prayers her head was slightly raised; when they ceased, it sank down again upon the pavement. About this time a train passed by, close to the window of the little room, and the harsh whistle of the engine disturbed, for a moment, the profound quiet that reigned around. What a startling contrast was here, between the scene without, representing the busy world in its onward march, noisy and self-confident, and the scene within, representing Christ crucified—a stumbling block, indeed, to the Jews, and a foolishness to the Gentiles, but to them that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

From the way in which the Ecstatica had fallen to the ground, her body was partly doubled up, and her left arm was bent in under her breast. In this position she remained for about twenty minutes. But at three o'clock exactly, a remarkable movement was observed. Her body became extended to its full length, her arms were stretched out at right angles to her body, and her right foot placed itself over her

left. One of the priests who were present bent up her right arm into a more convenient position; when the pressure was withdrawn, it was at once stretched out again as before. In like manner, when the Curé moved the right foot from its position, it was instantly carried back, as if by a secret spring.

After this, no further change occurred; and about twenty minutes past three, at the bidding of the Curé, we took our leave. As we passed out, we saw the mother of Louise in one room, sitting alone, apparently very infirm and stricken in years. In the next room were the two sisters, busied with their sewing machine and their needlework. All were simple and graceful; neither forward on the one hand, nor awkward or embarrassed on the other: not over eager to talk, yet entering with ease into conversation, when spoken to.

But the Curé was not the man to encourage idle gossip. He motioned to us, from behind, to move on, and got us out of the house as quickly as he could. After exchanging greetings

with a few persons in the miscellaneous crowd, and thanking the Curé for his kindness, I turned my steps in the direction of Manage, and left, the same evening, by train for Ghent.

PART II.

HER LIFE AND ITS WONDERS.

CHAPTER I.

AUTHENTIC SOURCE OF INFORMATION.

DOCTOR LEFEBVRE OF LOUVAIN—HIS COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE CASE—HIS QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE TASK—HIS OPPORTUNITIES—HE CALLS IN OTHER PHYSICIANS—HIS FEELING OF DISTRUST IN THE BEGINNING—HIS AUTHENTIC REPORT.

HAVING seen so much of Louise Lateau, I could not but wish to know something more about her. A hundred questions arose in my mind, as to the details of her life, and the history of those extraordinary phenomena of which I had witnessed but a single manifestation. It was, therefore, a great pleasure to me to learn that

an eminent Belgian physician, Doctor Lefebvre, Professor of Pathology and Therapeutics in the University of Louvain, had been called upon professionally to study the physical condition of the ecstatic girl; that he had conducted a long and patient investigation of the case, extending over eighteen months; and that the results of this investigation he had recently given to the world in a volume, which bore all the marks of calm deliberation and scientific accuracy.

Few men could be found better qualified than Doctor Lefebvre to conduct an inquiry of this kind. He had been, for fifteen years, at the head of the medical staff of two lunatic asylums; and for the same period, had been engaged in giving lectures on mental diseases. Thus he had been led, as he tells us, by his duties as well as by his tastes, to explore both practically and theoretically the whole range of nervous affections.

For the purpose of his inquiry, he was allowed free access to Louise at all times, even without previous notice; and he was requested by the

ecclesiastical authorities, under whose sanction he acted, not to shrink from any test or experiment which the severe exigencies of modern science might seem to demand.

In the execution of his task Doctor Lefebvre did not trust to his own judgment alone. To make sure that he was not deceived in his observation of the facts, and to guard himself against one-sided views, he generally took with him, on the occasion of his visits to Louise, some other witness of professional eminence. In this way, during the course of his investigation, he submitted her case to upwards of a hundred physicians.

Furthermore, it is worthy of notice that he entered on the inquiry himself with a strong feeling of distrust. "A suspicion," he says, "generally prevailed that this was some pious fraud, which the first glance of science would be sufficient to unmask: and I frankly confess that I was completely under the sway of this prejudice, when I entered, for the first time, the humble cottage of Bois d'Haine."

A memoir carefully elaborated by so competent an authority, under such favourable circumstances, could not but be regarded as singularly authentic. I eagerly sought out Doctor Lefebvre's book, as soon as I heard of it, and having procured a copy, with some difficulty, as it happened unfortunately to be out of print, I read it with great pleasure and intense interest. It furnished an answer to most of my questions, and dispelled some light clouds of doubt which had been floating in my mind. Possibly these doubts and questions may have occurred to my readers as well as to myself; and a short account of the facts, laboriously verified and recorded by Doctor Lefebvre, will not be uninteresting.

CHAPTER II.

OUTWARD LIFE OF LOUISE.

BIRTH—HER FATHER DIES—FAMILY LEFT DESTITUTE—TIMELY ARRIVAL OF SUCCOUR—STRUGGLE AGAINST POVERTY—LOUISE GOES TO SERVICE—THEN TO SCHOOL FOR FIVE MONTHS—THEN TO SERVICE AGAIN—COMES HOME FOR GOOD—SERIOUS ILLNESS—RECOVERY—THE STIGMAS APPEAR—THE ECSTASY—THE BLEEDING CORONET—DOCTOR LEFEBVRE CALLED IN.

Louise Lateau was born at Bois d'Haine, in the house where she now lives, on the thirtieth of January, 1850. Her father, who was then twenty-eight years of age, was a plain labouring man, employed at a neighbouring foundry. He is represented as having been upright and industrious, frugal in his way of life, robust and vigorous in his physical constitution. Before the end of three months, however, from the birth of Louise, he was attacked with small-pox, and died on the seventeenth of April, 1850.

He left behind him a widow and three daughters. The eldest, Rosine, was just three

years old; the second, Adeline, a little more than two; the third, Louise, not quite three months. Nothing could be imagined more helpless and desolate than the condition of this little household. The poor mother, who had been ill ever since the birth of Louise, was not yet able to leave her bed; Louise herself was suffering from the malignant disease which had carried her father to the grave; and, to crown their misery, friends and neighbours all shrunk away, in terror, from the infected dwelling.

Little Rosine did all that a child could do. Passing back and forward between the sick bed of her mother and the cradle of her infant sister, she managed to bring to them, with her tiny hands, the absolute necessaries of life. Days passed by: the scanty resources of the labourer's cottage were soon exhausted, and hunger began to be felt.

In this extremity, succour came at length from the hands of a good peasant, named François Delalieu. This worthy man, suspect-

ing how matters must be, made his way into the house, twelve days after the father's death. Louise he found almost in a dying state, while the rest of the family were reduced to the last extreme of want. He sent at once for provisions, and relieved their most pressing necessities: nor did he cease, from that day, to watch over and assist them, until they were all restored to health and strength.

The mother's illness was grave and protracted, and when, at the end of two years and a half, she had completely regained her former health, she found herself with scarcely any means of support except the little bit of ground on which the cottage stood, and which, in happier days, had been her own marriage portion. But she accepted her hard lot with a bold and courageous spirit. She resolved to struggle against poverty, and to keep herself independent. Evening and morning she devoted herself to the care of her children, and all day long she toiled for their daily bread. While she was away at her work, she had to leave them at home by themselves,

putting the two younger under the charge of the elder. Poor little children, they had many privations to endure: they had to bear the cold of winter without a fire, and we are told that their food was more than frugal. Nevertheless, they grew up strong and healthy; and the time soon came when they were able to take their share of work.

At the age of eight, Louise was placed, for a short time, with a feeble old woman of the neighbourhood, who required attendance while her son was absent at work. Later on, she was sent to school for five months. There she manifested good dispositions, learned her catechism, and made some progress in reading and writing. This was all the schooling she ever got. At eleven, she made her First Communion; and then went to live with her grand-aunt, at Manage. This good woman was seventy-eight years of age, and very infirm: she died two years afterwards; and Louise, who had served her, during that time, with rare zeal and devotion, went next into the service of a lady in Brussels.

Here she got ill; and was obliged to leave at the end of seven months. But her mistress has never ceased to regard her with affection; and still comes to see her, from time to time, at Bois d'Haine. In a few weeks, Louise was well again, and once more at work; having found a new engagement in the family of a small farmer at Manage. From this place she was, soon after, called back by her mother; and has since remained at home, devoting herself entirely to needlework and household duties.

Early in the year 1867, Louise, having reached a critical period of life, began to show signs of delicacy. Her appetite failed: the colour disappeared from her cheeks: and, later on, she suffered severely from neuralgic pains in all parts of her body. But, throughout that year, she was not regularly ill, and was able to continue her accustomed duties. In the following March, however, her malady reached a crisis: and for a whole month she scarcely ate or drank anything but the medicine prescribed by the doctor.

To such a degree of weakness was she reduced, by the fifteenth of April, that her life was in danger, and she received the Last Sacraments. From this out she got better: and so rapid was her recovery that, on the twenty-first of the same month, she walked to the Parish Church to Mass, and back again, a distance altogether of somewhat more than a mile. Since that time she has continued to enjoy unbroken good health.

Three days after she had given this signal proof of restoration to health, that is to say, on Friday the twenty-fourth of April, 1868, the first trace of the Stigmas appeared. She noticed that some blood flowed, on that day, from her left side. With her usual reserve she made no mention of it to any one, not even to her mother or sisters.

On the next Friday, blood came again, from the same spot, and also from the upper surface of both feet. She now confided the matter to her spiritual director. The priest, though greatly struck by so extraordinary a phenome-

non, wisely judged it expedient not to excite her imagination. He tried to restore her tranquillity, and told her to say nothing about it.

On the third Friday, May the eighth, blood flowed, during the night, from her left side, and her feet; and towards nine o'clock in the morning, it came also abundantly from the palms and backs of her hands. She passed for the first time, into an Ecstasy, on Friday the seventeenth of July, in the same year: and two months later, on Friday, September the twenty-fifth, the coronet of bleeding points appeared around her head. All these phenomena, from the time of their first appearance, have been repeated, on each successive Friday, with little or no interruption: the only exceptions being, that the bleeding coronet was occasionally wanting during the first year, and that the other Stigmas failed to bleed on two occasions.

From the time that blood began to issue from her hands, the extraordinary condition of Louise could no longer remain a secret. The news spread abroad. Crowds assembled weekly round

her mother's house; and the excitement soon became so great that the ecclesiastical authorities felt it their duty to take some action in the matter. It was then that they asked Doctor Lefebvre to institute a scrutiny of the whole case, from a medical point of view. His attendance commenced on the thirtieth of August, 1868, and has continued down to the present time.

CHAPTER III.

INNER LIFE OF LOUISE.

HER CHEERFUL DISPOSITION—HER COMMON SENSE—HER PRACTICAL PIETY—NO AFFECTATION OF SANCTITY—RESERVE ON THE SUBJECT OF HER STIGMAS AND HER ECSTASY—HER DEVOTION TO THE SICK—HER HEROISM IN TIME OF PESTILENCE—MOTHER OF LOUISE—HER HIGH SPIRIT—HER TESTY HUMOUR—HER PRAYER TO THE BISHOP.

Louise Lateau is described as a person of simple upright character, and of a cheerful, kindly, unselfish disposition. She is intelligent,

without being brilliant or acute; and is wholly devoid of imagination. Downright common sense seems to be her distinguishing characteristic. Her piety, too, is practical and unobtrusive. Entirely free from affectation, she follows the beaten paths; but she follows them with fidelity. She loves solitude and retirement; and, except in obedience to her ecclesiastical superiors, she never speaks about the extraordinary phenomena of which she is the subject.

On this last point Doctor Lefebvre made very minute inquiries; and he assures us that, though she has some female friends of her own age, to whom she has been affectionately attached from her childhood, the question of her Ecstasies and her Stigmas is never spoken of between them. Nay, she maintains the same reserve even with her mother and her sisters: and they, on their part, never introduce the subject in her presence.

Though her life is, for the most part, hidden and obscure, yet in times of sickness and afflic-

tion her beautiful character shines forth with a bright radiance, and she is then the good angel, not of her own home only, but of the whole village. Doctor Lefebvre had special facilities for observing her conduct, under very trying circumstances, towards the close of the year 1868. Her eldest sister was attacked with typhoid fever, and during six weeks required the most assiduous care. At the same time, her mother was ill with inflammation of the lungs.

The charge of both devolved upon Louise; for her second sister could not be spared from her work. Night and day she was on her feet, and for more than a month she scarcely ever slept. Some harsh words, too, she had to bear from the poor old mother, whose temper, none of the best even in sunny times, was now embittered by sickness and pain. "In the midst of these contradictions and fatigues," says Doctor Lefebvre, "I found this young girl always the same; serene, calm, smiling."

Even before the Stigmas first appeared, her

charity and devotion to the sick were strikingly manifested on a remarkable occasion. In 1866, the cholera, then prevalent in Belgium, made its appearance at Bois d'Haine. It broke out first in a workman's family, consisting of seven persons. Three were at once laid prostrate, father, mother, and daughter; while the four sons fled in terror from the plague-stricken house. The Curé, in this emergency, sent for Louise. With a fortitude beyond her years,—she was then but sixteen,—this brave girl took up her post in the infected and deserted dwelling. The father and mother died soon after, soothed to the last by her tender care; and she continued to watch over the surviving daughter, until she was removed to a more fitting asylum. Then, left alone with the dead, she prepared the bodies for burial, and calling in the aid of her sister Adeline, put them in their coffins, and left them outside of the house to be carried away to the grave yard. And so she went on with her pious work, from day to day, as long as the epidemic lasted; soothing the sufferings

of the sick, and performing the last rites of charity for the dead. When the pestilence ceased to rage, she retired again into obscurity.

The mother of Louise is a straightforward religious woman, greatly esteemed by her neighbours. She has had much rough work to do in her time, and has been obliged to struggle hard against poverty; but she is nevertheless distinguished by a certain high spirit, and delicacy of feeling, not always to be found in her position. Though often in sore distress, she would never consent to sell her cottage, saying, she would not barter for money the home where her husband had lived, and where her children were born. And sometimes, of late, when a visitor would imprudently offer money to her, she not only refused to accept his gift, but took care to let him see that she regarded it as an insult.

It is said she is of bilious temperament, and subject to fits of testy humour; which she discharges sometimes on her visitors, sometimes on her children. Nevertheless, she dearly

loves Louise, and has often declared, with simple earnestness, that she never knew her to commit a fault, or to be guilty of the smallest disobedience.

The wonderful condition of her daughter she looks on, not so much as a favour, but rather as a trial sent by God, to which it is her duty to be resigned: and she feels no small irritation and displeasure at the crowds that gather round her house from week to week. The Bishop of the diocese came from Tournay to pay her a visit, in the year 1869. Before taking leave, he graciously wished to know if she had any favour to ask. In reply, she earnestly begged—and her daughters joined their prayer with hers—that his Lordship would be good enough to forbid all visits to her house in future, and let them live thenceforth in retirement and peace.



CHAPTER IV.

THE STIGMAS.

FORM AND SIZE OF THE STIGMAS—ORDINARY APPEARANCE—TIME OF BLEEDING—QUANTITY OF BLOOD—WAY IN WHICH THE BLOOD ESCAPES—ANALOGY WITH THE CASE OF A BLISTER—PECULIARITY OF THE BLEEDING CORONET—CHARACTER AND COMPOSITION OF THE BLOOD—THE STIGMAS A CAUSE OF PAIN—APPEARANCE NEXT DAY.

THE Stigmas have been often and carefully examined by Doctor Lefebvre, sometimes with the naked eye only, sometimes with the aid of a powerful magnifier: and he gives us a minute account of them, in his book, with all the deliberation and precision of exact science. Those on the back and palm of each hand are oval in shape: those on the upper and lower surface of each foot are described rather as oblong parallelograms, with rounded angles. When accurately measured, they are found to be not all of exactly the same size; but the difference is so slight as to be scarcely sensible to the eye. The average length may be roughly set down

at about an inch; the average breadth, at something more than half an inch. Besides these, there is another stigmatic mark on the left side, circular in shape, and a little over half an inch in diameter.

All these nine Stigmas are permanent and indelible: but only on Friday do they bleed. During the rest of the week, they are distinguished by a bright red colour, and a certain glossy appearance. No fracture of the skin is observable, even when they are scrutinized through a magnifying glass. The forehead, on the other hand, shows no permanent marks; and on Fridays only is it possible to recognise the points from which the blood escapes.

The bleeding of the Stigmas usually sets in between twelve and one o'clock on Thursday night. It continues all day on Friday, and generally ceases towards evening; though it has sometimes lasted up to midnight. The quantity of blood that comes is variable. Before the Ecstasy first appeared it was generally more copious than it is now. The earliest witnesses

computed the amount, on some days, at about a quart.

When Doctor Lefebvre came into attendance, he tried to make a more exact estimate: but he found it difficult to do so, because the blood is always absorbed by the linen cloths in which the bleeding members are enveloped. He states, however, with confidence, that, on several days, the quantity could not have been less than two hundred and fifty grammes;—about nine ounces avoirdupois, or nearly half a pint of liquid measure.

In order to understand exactly the way in which the blood flows from the Stigmas, it is necessary to bear in mind that the skin of the human body consists of two distinct layers. The upper layer, which constitutes the actual surface of the body, is called the cuticle, or, more technically, the *epidermis;* the under layer is called the true skin, or *dermis.* The former is a thin semi-transparent membrane, composed of minute cells, which are constantly passing off in the form of powder or scales, and are as con-

stantly renewed. It is quite insensible to pain, and does not bleed when cut. The *dermis* is thicker, very sensitive, and bleeds freely.

In the case of a blister this distinction between the two layers of skin, is very clearly brought out; the cuticle being, in fact, detached and swelled out, by a quantity of watery liquid which exudes from the *dermis*, and fills up the space between them. Every one knows that the membrane thus puffed out, may be cut or torn, without drawing blood, or causing any pain. But when this is removed, and the liquid matter flows away, the under skin is seen below, very tender, and traversed by a vast number of minute blood vessels.

Now it is precisely in the form of blisters that the first symptoms of an approaching flow of blood show themselves in the case of Louise Lateau. These symptoms generally begin to appear, about the middle of the day, on Thursday. Without any apparent cause, the *epidermis* of each Stigma is separated from the *dermis*, and a watery liquid is interposed between them. A

blister is thus established in each case, of exactly the same form and extent as its corresponding Stigma. This blister continues to rise until it attains its full development: it then bursts open of itself; the watery liquid passes off; and the blood begins to flow from the true skin underneath.

As to the coronet around the head, it consists of a large number of bleeding points which are visible on Fridays only, and which present an appearance peculiar to themselves. They cannot be conveniently examined under the hair. But on the forehead, where they are from twelve to fifteen in number, they form a band about an inch wide, midway between the roots of the hair and the eyebrows. There is no permanent discoloration of the surface, no appearance of a blister, no exposure of the under skin. But, with the aid of a magnifying glass, it is possible to detect exceedingly minute punctures of the *epidermis*, through which the blood escapes.

The blood that flows from the Stigmas has

not the bright scarlet colour of arterial blood, nor yet the deep purple hue of venous; but resembles rather the blood of the *capillaries*, that is to say, the fine tubes through which the blood is conveyed from the arteries to the veins. It is of ordinary consistence, and freely coagulates, or clots, like common blood.

With a view to investigate its character still more closely, Doctor Lefebvre, as he tells us, "installed a microscope" in the cottage of Louise, and examined the blood, at the moment of its escape from the body. In this examination he was assisted by two of his medical colleagues, who were both skilled in microscopical researches, M. Hairion, Professor of Hygiene, and M. Van Kempen, Professor of Anatomy.

After a careful scrutiny, they were all fully satisfied that the stigmatic blood of Louise presents no peculiarity of structure or appearance. The red and white corpuscles are quite of a normal character, and are mixed in the ordinary proportion. The *plasma*, or liquid in which they are suspended, is colourless, as is

usual, and perfectly transparent. In a word, the red fluid of the Stigmas, whether taken as a whole or examined in its constituent elements, is simply an average specimen of healthy human blood.

There can be little doubt that the bleeding of the Stigmas is a source of pain, though Louise never speaks of it. During the Ecstasy, indeed, she is probably unconscious of pain, as she is of every other bodily sensation. But before the Ecstasy has set in, and after it has ceased, Doctor Lefebvre is convinced that she suffers acutely; judging as well from pathological considerations, as from the expression and movements of her countenance.

Towards evening on Friday, the bleeding usually stops; but not always at the same hour. On the next day, the Stigmas are dry and somewhat glossy. Here and there may be observed some scales of dried blood, but they are soon cast off; and a new *epidermis* is furnished by Nature instead of that which was destroyed. Early in the morning Louise is at her ordinary

work: and she only interrupts her work, to go to hear Mass, and to receive Holy Communion at the Parish Church.

CHAPTER V.

THE ECSTASY.

HOW IT COMES ON—DESCRIPTIONS BY EYE-WITNESSES—DOCTOR LEFEBVRE—DOCTOR IMBERT GOURBEYRE—EFFORTS TO RESIST THE ECSTASY BY WORK AND DISTRACTION—RESULT AS SEEN BY THE BISHOP OF BRITISH COLUMBIA—VARIOUS PHASES OF THE ECSTASY—THE CLOSING SCENE.

THE Ecstasy, at present, begins between nine and ten o'clock on Friday morning, and lasts until about five in the afternoon: formerly, it used to begin one or two hours earlier, and last one or two hours later. Louise, being unfit for work on Friday, on account of the bleeding Stigmas, is generally at her prayers when the Ecstasy comes on. But it comes on, all the same, even though she be engaged in

distracting conversation. Doctor Lefebvre has been present on many an occasion of this kind: and of one, in particular, he has given us a very exact record.

"It is half-past seven in the morning. I open a conversation with the girl, and I make it a point to engage her attention with things the most indifferent. I ask her about her occupations, her education, her health. She answers my questions simply, exactly, briefly. During the course of this conversation, her look is calm, the expression of her face is natural, and it wears its accustomed colour. Her skin is cool: her pulse beats seventy-two in the minute. After some time the conversation languishes, and there is a pause of a few moments. I wish to begin again, but I perceive that Louise is motionless, with her eyes raised up and fixed in contemplation. She is rapt in Ecstasy."

An account very similar to this, and written, like it, on the spot, is given to us by Doctor Imbert Gourbeyre, professor in the medical school of Clermont, in Auvergne. "I had been

examining and questioning Louise," he says, "for an hour and a quarter. My last question was about the cholera patients whom she had attended. She told me she had seen nine or ten of them die. I ask her if she was afraid. She answers that she was not. 'Are you fond then of nursing the sick?' I say; and I go on writing this question, with my eyes fixed on the paper. Louise gives no answer. I look up at her, and see that she is already in her Ecstasy."

In the summer of 1869, Louise was directed by her spiritual superiors, to resist the Ecstasy, as far as lay in her power. This course was considered desirable for the purpose of a strict investigation of her case from a Theological point of view. It was even prescribed that, on Friday mornings, she was to remain at her ordinary work, whatever difficulty or pain she might experience in doing so. About this time, the Bishop of British Columbia, Doctor d'Herbomez, obtained permission from the ecclesiastical authorities to see the Ecstatica: and he presented himself at the house, attended by the

Abbé Mortier, on Friday, the thirteenth of August, about eight o'clock in the morning.

When he entered, Louise was at work with the sewing machine. Her hands and feet were bleeding profusely. On her forehead, too, and round her head, in a complete circle, blood was flowing copiously, and it was streaming down over her face and neck. The sewing machine was covered with it; and only by the most painful exertions, was the poor girl able to continue her work.

The Bishop entered into conversation with her, and asked her some questions. She answered with her usual quietness of manner, and with perfect intelligence, going on meanwhile with her task, according to the instructions she had received. All at once, the machine stopped short: her hands were still: her body motionless. The work had ceased, the Ecstasy begun.

The condition of Louise, during the time of Ecstasy, has been already partly described in the First Part of this Volume. But some

points, well worthy of record, have fallen under the observation of Doctor Lefebvre, during the long period of his attendance, which could not be noted in a single short visit. He tells us that the attitude as well as the countenance of the Ecstatica undergoes many and frequent changes. Now her body moves slowly round, as on a pivot, and her eyes seem to follow the progress of some invisible procession : anon she rises from her seat, advances a few steps, and raises up her hands in prayer. At one moment, her features expand, and a smile of delight plays across her face : at another, her eyelids fall, her features contract, and tears roll down her cheeks : again, she trembles and grows pale ; an expression of terror is depicted on her countenance ; and a stifled cry escapes from her lips.

Most startling and solemn of all is the closing scene of the Ecstasy. The Ecstatic girl rises, with a bound, from the floor, on which she has lain so long prostrate. Her pulse, which in the early stages was healthy and

she answers Doctor Lefebvre with precision and simplicity, whenever he examines her about them.

Her account is, that as soon as the Ecstasy comes on, she finds herself plunged in a sea of light: then figures begin to appear; and the various scenes of the Passion are enacted before her eyes. Not a word is spoken that she can hear: but the processions move sadly along, as if in living reality. The Apostles are there, and the Jews, the Roman soldiers, the holy women. She sees the Saviour, too, and can describe minutely his appearance, his clothes, his wounds, the crown of thorns, the cross.

But it would seem that Louise is favoured, in her Ecstasy, with a still higher degree of illumination, akin to the spirit of prophecy. While she remains insensible to every other voice, she recognises at once, and obeys, the voice of one who has spiritual jurisdiction over her;—whether it be her Bishop, her parish priest, or any other priest to whom, for the occasion, jurisdiction has been given, unknown to her.

In like manner, sacred objects of any kind, presented to her lips,—blessed beads, or medals, or crosses,—are sure to bring a smile of joy over her face: while the very same material things, if not blessed, produced no effect whatever. This prophetic instinct, as it may be called, has been often tested, and never known to fail. On one remarkable occasion, it was manifested in a very wonderful way indeed.

The reader will remember that Louise was visited, one Friday in August, by Doctor d'Herbomez, Bishop of British Columbia, attended by the Abbé Mortier; and that she passed into her Ecstasy, on that day, whilst at work with her sewing machine. Her distinguished visitors, having seen the Ecstasy thus wonderfully begin, resolved to remain throughout the day, and to watch its progress. About ten o'clock the Curé of the parish came in. He had been attending a sick woman in the neighbourhood; and had with him, enclosed in a silk bag, a small silver case, called a Pyx, in which he had carried the Blessed Sacrament to her house. In the same

bag was another silver case, which contained the Holy Oil used for the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

As the Curé had taken but a single consecrated host from the Church, and had given that to the sick woman, he believed that the Pyx was now empty: and it occurred to him that he might, without irreverence, employ the silk bag, with the two sacred vessels it contained, as a test for Louise. Accordingly, he took it out, just as it was, and gave it to the Abbé Mortier, who wished to make the experiment.

The result was far more striking than had been expected. Before the Abbé Mortier had come within two yards of the chair on which the ecstatic girl was seated, she started up, as in a transport of joy, and fell on her knees in adoration. The Abbé retired a little: she followed him. He retired further: she followed still. And so he drew her round the room.

Her attitude, during this scene, was very peculiar. She was partly kneeling, but her

knees did not touch the ground: her body leaned forward: her hands were joined as in prayer. She did not walk, but rather glided over the floor: and wherever the bag with the sacred vessels was carried, there she followed, as a needle follows the loadstone. At length, the silk bag, with its contents, was put aside. She then resumed her seat, and subsided into her wonted state of motionless contemplation.

This extraordinary scene was repeated several times that day; the sacred vessels being presented sometimes by the Bishop, sometimes by the Abbé Mortier. At first, the only witnesses present, besides the mother and sisters of Louise, were the three ecclesiastics; and it was wisely judged expedient to secure, if possible, the presence of some distinguished layman. A message was accordingly despatched to an eminent statesman, who happened, just then, to be staying at his country seat, not far off. He came at once to the house of Louise; and in common with the rest, witnessed, again and again, the strange phenomena above described.

The Bishop conjectured that, by some chance, a consecrated host, or possibly a part of one, had remained in the Pyx, without the knowledge of the Curé: and that this was the cause of all the emotions, and the movements of adoration on the part of Louise. He proposed, therefore, to separate the sacred vessels, and to try the effect of each by itself alone.

First he took the case containing the Holy Oil, and presented it to the Ecstatica. No effect was produced until it touched her lips; and then she smiled, as she is accustomed to do, at the contact of things that are blessed. The Pyx was next presented. When it was yet two yards off, the transport of joy returned: she fell upon her knees, in adoration, as before, and followed the sacred vessel whithersoever it was carried.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon, when the Bishop and his three fellow-witnesses left the cottage. They went at once together to the Parish Church. There, in the presence of all four, the Pyx was opened, and it was found to

contain a pretty considerable fragment of the consecrated species.

The statesman, who had been so unexpectedly called from his villa in the morning, and had passed the greater part of the day in the house of the Ecstatica, went home deeply impressed with the scenes he had witnessed, and drew up, at his leisure, a careful report of the facts. This report was subsequently confirmed, even to the smallest details, by the ecclesiastical witnesses; and from it has been mainly derived the account which is here set forth.

The events of this memorable day were soon brought to the knowledge of Doctor Lefebvre. He recognised, at once, that the facts were established by evidence which few would call in question. But he fancied that some might be found who would attempt to account for these facts by natural means, and would refer them, perhaps, to those mysterious powers, supposed by some philosophers to be developed in certain peculiar states of the mind, and known under the name of Clairvoyance. They would

say, that the girl, in her trance, enjoyed an exceptional keenness of intellectual vision, by virtue of which her mind was enabled to pierce through the silk bag and the two silver cases; and thus she became conscious that the one contained only the Holy Oil, the other, a consecrated host. To meet this explanation, a new and ingenious test was devised by Doctor Lefebvre.

On Friday, the nineteenth of November, in the same year, the Curé of Bois d'Haine came to the house of the Ecstatica accompanied by an eminent professor from Tournay, the Reverend Canon Hallez. It was nine o'clock in the morning, when they arrived, and Louise was already in her Ecstasy. They had brought with them a Pyx, exactly resembling the one that had produced such wonderful effects on the thirteenth of August; and it was enveloped in the same silk bag that had been used on that occasion. In the Pyx they placed a small host, not consecrated.

Here, then, all the material conditions were

exactly the same as before. Yet when the silk bag, with the Pyx in it, was presented to Louise, and even pressed against her lips, there was no transport, no act of adoration, not even a faint movement of the features: she remained fixed in contemplation, insensible, motionless.

It was plain, therefore, so far as these experiments went, that the fanciful theory of Clairvoyance, even if admitted to be true, would not be sufficient to account for the facts. Louise was vehemently affected by the presence of a consecrated host, while she was insensible to the presence of a host that was not consecrated. Consequently she possessed, for the time being, not only the extraordinary power of penetrating, with her mental vision, through the silk bag and the silver case, but the still more extraordinary power of discerning a host that was consecrated from one that was not: and such a faculty of discrimination as this, has never yet been ascribed, even by the wildest visionary, to the powers of Clairvoyance.

The complete insensibility of Louise to ordi-

nary material objects is scarcely less remarkable than her sensitiveness to those that are sacred. During the time of her Ecstasy, the functions of all her senses are suspended. She sees nothing, though her eyes are wide open. She hears no sound but the voice of those who have spiritual jurisdiction over her.

Doctor Lefebvre has employed various expedients to test the extent and the genuineness of this insensibility. He flashed a light in her face, and there was no movement of the eyes or eyelids. He applied liquid ammonia, a most pungent and irritating substance, to the interior of her nostrils, without producing any apparent effect upon one of the most delicate and sensitive membranes of the human body. He got a person, standing behind her, to emit suddenly a piercing cry, close to her ear; yet not the faintest trace of sensation could be detected.

The insensibility of her skin he tested with still greater severity, one would almost say cruelty. He pricked her hands and face with a needle. He gathered up a fold of the skin

between his fingers, and pierced it through and through, with a large pin, working the pin about, afterwards, in the hole it had made. He drove the point of a penknife into her flesh so as to make the blood spurt out. All these experiments were repeated several times, in the presence of various witnesses, many of them doctors, and none could ever detect any symptom of sensibility, or even the slightest muscular contraction.

Next he tried the efficacy of electric shocks. The apparatus he employed produced currents so powerful that a strong man could not endure them for more than five or six seconds at a time. After several preliminary trials, he applied the two conductors to the inner surface of the arm, where the skin is naturally very fine and sensitive. For the space of seventy seconds, he continued to send the electric current, at its full intensity, through this delicate membrane, without producing any effect whatever.

Then he applied the conductors to the face of the Ecstatica, and passed the current through

various muscles. The muscles were violently contracted, but there seemed to be no sensation properly so called, no consciousness. The eyes never blinked, nor did the ecstatic girl lose, for a moment, her singular look of calm and profound contemplation.

PART III.

IMPOSSIBILITY OF FRAUD.

CHAPTER I.

INTRINSIC IMPOSSIBILITY.

LOUISE COULD NOT HERSELF PRODUCE THE STIGMAS—NO MEANS KNOWN TO SCIENCE CAPABLE OF PRODUCING THEM—NEITHER COULD SHE PRODUCE THE ECSTASY—MUCH LESS BOTH TOGETHER—IF AN IMPOSTOR SHE COULD NOT HAVE ESCAPED DETECTION—CLOSELY SCRUTINIZED BY MEN OF SCIENCE—THEIR PREJUDICES—STORY OF AN UNBELIEVING DOCTOR—UNEXPECTED VISITS.

THOSE who are familiar with the history and the daily life of Louise have never entertained against her, even for a moment, the suspicion of fraud. It is inconsistent alike with her ex-

treme simplicity of character, and with her solid, unpretending piety.

But at the present day, and in this country more particularly, whatever seems to bear upon the supernatural relations of man, and upon the unseen world, is sure to be received with scepticism by unbelievers, and with keen criticism even by the friends of religion. It may be well, therefore, to examine this question of fraud a little more closely, and to demonstrate, with some degree of minuteness, that the prodigies displayed in the ecstatic girl of Bois d'Haine, are not counterfeit, but real and genuine.

The supposition of fraud means simply that Louise is an impostor; that she produces the bleeding Stigmas herself, and that the Ecstasy is only a pretence. Now, it is surely not reasonable to ascribe these wonderful phenomena to the ingenuity of a peasant girl, if they cannot be produced even by the highest degree of trained and cultivated skill. Yet this is literally true.

Let us take first the Stigmas only. If not genuine, they must be caused by instruments

or medical appliances of some kind. But no instruments or appliances are known to exist that would be at all suitable for such a purpose. It is simply a fact, that the most skilful and experienced surgeons, with all the resources of medical science at their command, are absolutely incapable of producing, on the human body, those appearances which are witnessed every week in the person of Louise Lateau. Are we to believe, then, that the untutored village girl, slaving, her whole life long, at menial drudgery, has herself invented a fraud, which all the science of the world is unable to imitate?

But the Stigmas are only one part of the wonder. The impossibility of fraud is not less evident, when we come to consider the Ecstasy. Persons gifted with a certain dramatic power are, no doubt, able to feign unconsciousness, and to assume an air of complete abstraction. But this pretence would very soon give way before the severe and painful tests that have been applied to Louise. Does any one believe it possible for an actor, however skilled in his art, to continue

pretending insensibility, and never shrink or move, while his hands and face are punctured with a needle, his skin perforated, his flesh cut open, his muscles convulsed by the action of powerful electric currents? And if we do not believe this possible for a strong man, and a trained actor, how can we believe it possible for a simple peasant girl?

Finally, it must be remembered that we have to account for the two phenomena, not separately, but conjointly. Besides the extreme difficulty of producing each, considered in itself, there is a very special difficulty in bringing them on together, and maintaining them together for several hours at a time. For, if they be regarded as the result of art, it is plain they are, in a certain sense, contradictory. To keep up a constant flow of blood, it must be necessary to employ, from time to time, some contrivance or other, whatever it may be: whereas, for the Ecstasy it is necessary to remain, all the time, apparently unconscious and, for the most part, motionless.

There is another grave consideration against the possibility of fraud. For a successful imposture it is not enough to produce certain extraordinary effects; it is necessary, moreover, to escape detection; in other words, to conceal the means by which these effects are produced. Now, even though Louise had been able to do what is impossible for all the rest of the world, and to produce in herself, by artificial means, the Stigmas and the Ecstasy, she could not have escaped detection, exposed as she has been, week after week, for four years together, not merely to the eager curiosity of a crowd, watching all her movements, but to the cold and sceptical scrutiny of scientific men.

Not to speak of high ecclesiastical dignitaries and distinguished Theologians, she has been visited, we are told, by more than a hundred Physicians, whose special purpose it was to investigate her case, according to the strict principles of their science. Now it is hardly credible that a peasant girl, brought up in poverty and hardship, without education, with-

out knowledge of the world, was more than a match for such critics as these; nay, that she was so skilled in the ways of deceit as completely to delude and baffle them all, while, at the same time, she submitted freely to the most searching inquiries, the most painful tests.

Nor must it be imagined that these witnesses approached the case with a prepossession in favour of Louise. Many went doubting, many disbelieving; some even went for the express purpose of exposing what they believed to be a fraud. Of these last was a certain free-thinking doctor, whose testimony is deserving of especial notice. He was chosen by a section of the infidel party in Belgium, to represent them at Bois d'Haine, and to unmask, as they said, the clerical comedy that was there enacted.

It was on the eighth of January, 1869, that he presented himself at the house of the Ecstatica. As he had obtained no special authority to visit Louise, and as there was a great crowd in the house that day, he was, at first, refused admission. Afterwards, however, he was recognised

by one of the medical visitors, through whose influence he was allowed to enter. He remained several hours, and went away an altered man. His friends were waiting for him, at the railway station, and immediately on his arrival, began to question him, in scoffing words, about the prodigies he had seen. But he checked them and said: "My friends, there is nothing to laugh at in what I have witnessed to-day, but rather much to make me think very seriously." Soon after, he was converted from his evil ways, and died a good Catholic, two years later.

Any one suspecting Louise to be an impostor, would naturally wish to look into her little cell, on some Friday, when no visitor was there, and none was expected,—in other words, to take the impostor by surprise. This has been done several times during the last four years, and always the ecstatic girl has been found to present the same appearance, in the midst of profound solitude, as she is wont to present when surrounded by a crowd of eager spectators.

An interesting record of one such visit is

given to us by Doctor Lefebvre. On the eleventh of February, 1870, he found himself, most unexpectedly, in the neighbourhood of Bois d'Haine; and remembering that it was Friday, he thought of looking in to see Louise. The door was opened directly he knocked; and without pausing in the outer room, where her sisters were at work, he passed at once into her own little chamber. And this is what he saw, as he tells us himself.

"It was a quarter to four o'clock. The most complete solitude reigned around the Ecstatica. She was prostrate on the floor, her arms extended in the form of a cross, insensible, and perfectly unconscious of what was passing around her. The linen cloths which had enveloped her bleeding limbs were lying there: I counted nine of them. The blood which had trickled from her forehead, was dried up, and appeared in the form of fantastic arabesques extending down upon her cheeks. The little white cap that covered her head was stained with bright red spots, forming a semicircle,

which completed the bleeding coronet of the forehead."

An impostor would hardly have been so well prepared for a visit altogether unforeseen. At all events, between the recurrence of such unexpected visits, and the scrutiny of science, and the prying curiosity of the crowd, it is difficult to believe that an unlettered peasant girl could have carried on an elaborate and complicated fraud, for more than four years, without detection.

CHAPTER II.

ABSENCE OF MOTIVE.

LOUISE NOT INFLUENCED BY VANITY—HAS ALWAYS SHUNNED NOTORIETY—TWICE PETITIONED TO HAVE VISITORS EXCLUDED—WOULD NOT LET HER PORTRAIT BE TAKEN—THE PRINCESS DE CROY REFUSED ADMISSION—NOT IMPELLED BY CUPIDITY—MONEY ALWAYS REFUSED—INCIDENT THAT BEFELL A YOUNG MAN FROM CHÂTELET.

FURTHER, it may be asked, what plausible motive can be suggested for a fraud involving so much pain for the impostor, and demanding

such unceasing watchfulness. The motives that commonly impel to frauds of this kind, are vanity and cupidity,—the desire of notoriety, and the desire of money. But no suspicion of these motives can be entertained in the case before us: for Louise shuns notoriety, except in so far as it is forced upon her by her superiors; and money she will not have, except what she earns by her daily toil.

No doubt, indeed, she has attained a certain degree of notoriety: but it has not been of her seeking. When the Stigmas first appeared, she concealed them as long as she could, except from her spiritual director, to whom she felt bound to have recourse for guidance and advice. Afterwards, when the weekly flow of blood became a well known fact, and visitors were attracted to the house, she refused persistently to show her bleeding hands, until she was commanded to do so by her superiors. And now, even among her familiar friends, she never touches on the subject of her Stigmas and her Ecstasies; nor in the domestic circle, is there ever a word spoken,

during the week, of the crowds that press around her, in her little cell on Friday.

It has been already told how, when the Bishop of Tournay came to see her, on Good Friday in the year 1869, and expressed a wish to bestow some mark of favour on the family, they all begged of him, with earnestness, to put an end to the visits by which they were so tormented and disturbed. On a similar occasion, in the previous year, Louise herself had pressed the same petition on the Archbishop of Mechlin.

She has exacted, too, from her mother and sisters, a solemn promise that they will never allow her portrait to be taken; a thing which she feared might be attempted, some Friday, whilst she was herself unconscious in her Ecstasy. And this promise has been faithfully kept to the present day. These surely are not the acts of a girl who has devised a systematic fraud for the purpose of drawing on herself the eyes of the world, and making herself the talk of society.

One incident, in particular, attested by Doc-

tor Lefebvre, may be cited to illustrate this argument. At a time when curious visitors, especially Physicians, were still admitted, without much difficulty, to see Louise,—in the month of January, 1869,—her mother, wearied with the incessant throng of strangers in her house, begged to be allowed a respite of one week, at least: and it was arranged that, on a certain Friday, the door should be closed, and no visitors admitted.

It so happened that, on this very day, the Princess de Croy came to see the Ecstatica. When she presented herself at the cottage, she was told she could not enter. She gave her name, and produced letters of recommendation; begging, at the same time, with great earnestness, to be admitted. But it was all no use. She was refused with courtesy, but with inexorable firmness; and had to go away without getting even one glance at Louise.

An unexpected event had brought Doctor Lefebvre, that same day, to a locality not far from Bois d'Haine. "It had been well under-

stood," he says, "that I was not to present myself on this Friday, no more than the rest. But the opportunity was a good one, and my curiosity was excited by the reflection, that as no one was to be received, I should take Louise absolutely by surprise. I went, therefore, to the house, and arrived just an hour after the Princess de Croy had left. The door, which was never closed to me, was opened without hesitation. And here is what I discovered. Not only had the accustomed phenomena been developed in solitude, just as well as in the presence of a crowd,—the Ecstasy in all its intensity, the Stigmas bleeding copiously,—but an extraordinary fact presented itself, which I had never seen before; which, in truth, appeared now only for the second time, and which few persons had seen on its first appearance. I mean the bleeding coronet around the forehead."

On this incident we may well argue, as does Doctor Lefebvre, that people do not get up a comedy for bare walls. If the whole scene had been simply a piece of acting, would the actors

have turned away spectators from the door? Would it not rather have been hailed as a rare piece of good fortune, that just at the opportune moment, when the new feature of a bleeding coronet had been added to the exhibition, a Princess should arrive, eager to witness the wonderful display, and sure to carry back the story of it into the great world in which she lived.

As for the motive of cupidity, it may be disposed of in a few words. Louise and her family were poor before the Stigmas and the Ecstasy appeared; and poor they have ever since remained. They used to earn their bread, in old times, by the work of their hands; and they do so still. If any one has offered them money, it has been always peremptorily refused. But few have ventured to do it. Visitors are too deeply impressed with the lofty spirit and the refined tone that pervade the modest cottage at Bois d'Haine; and they feel instinctively that no base desire of gain can find a place within its humble walls.

If money had been the object in view, it is plain that money could easily have been gathered in abundance, from the constant stream of rich and noble visitors who, during the last four years, have eagerly sought access to the Ecstatica. Yet though many hundreds have succeeded, and many hundreds, too, have failed, it does not appear that money was in any case a help, or the want of it a hindrance. One young man, who essayed the power of money, and found it a hindrance rather than a help, has himself told, with great simplicity, the story of his failure. It will serve to illustrate the character of the Lateau family, as regards the question of cupidity.

This young man came from Châtelet, not far from Charleroi, for the purpose of seeing Louise. Having failed to get in, when he first presented himself at the house, he remained in the neighbourhood all day, hoping to find a more favourable opportunity for attaining the object of his wishes. Towards evening, some friend inside begged of the family to let him in, for a few

minutes, as he had shown himself so patient, and besides, was now quite alone. They consented, and one of the sisters went to open the door.

The young man, in the meantime, had been thinking with himself how he might best manage to obtain admission: and having come to the conclusion that he would try the efficacy of gold, he was just, at the moment, looking for an opportunity to make the experiment. As soon, therefore, as he saw the door open, never thinking it had been opened for him, he came up and slipped a twenty-franc piece into the girl's hand. For a moment she was taken unawares, and looked bewildered. But quickly recovering, she handed him back his gold, and telling him with some warmth, that no one could enter there for money, she shut the door in his face.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLISTER TEST.

THE STIGMAS NOT PRODUCED BY A SHARP INSTRUMENT—NOR BY A CUPPING GLASS—NOR BY CAUTERY—RESEMBLANCE TO A BLISTER—IMPORTANT POINTS OF DIFFERENCE—EXPERIMENT OF DOCTOR LEFEBVRE—ARTIFICIAL BLISTER AND STIGMA SIDE BY SIDE—THE ONE BLEEDS THE OTHER DOES NOT.

When the Stigmas of Louise are carefully examined, by the light of medical science, it is at once apparent that they are not the work of sharp instruments, in the ordinary sense of the word. For such instruments act by cutting or piercing; and there is neither cut nor puncture in the Stigmas of Louise, but only a blister. Some writers have suggested a cupping glass, as affording a possible explanation. But a cupping glass will not produce a flow of blood, without the aid of an instrument to make an incision.

Besides, when the cupping glass is withdrawn, the flow of blood will quickly cease.

Others, again, have talked of cautery, that is, the application of a hot iron, or of some corrosive substance. But the effect of cautery has no resemblance to the appearances presented by the Stigmas. By cautery the substance of the skin is corroded, and a dry crust, or eschar, is formed, which after some days falls off. In the case of Louise the skin is not corroded, and no eschar is formed. Moreover, there is no flow of blood produced by cautery; or if a little blood sometimes comes, when the eschar falls off, it is sure to cease in a few minutes. Lastly, by the application of cautery to the same parts of the hands and feet and side, week after week, for four years together, the natural structure of the skin, in these parts, would have been utterly destroyed: whereas, in the Stigmas of Louise, the structure of the skin remains unchanged.

These various suppositions it has been necessary to mention, only in order to set them aside.

But there is another theory, deserving of more extended notice, which ascribes the Stigmas of Louise to the action of a vesicant, or blistering application. It is quite true that the effects of a vesicant bear some resemblance to the appearances presented by the stigmatic marks. Doctor Lefebvre has, therefore, devoted particular attention to this branch of the question. He has instituted a careful comparison between the two sets of phenomena, and he has shown very clearly, not only from the general principles of his art, but from actual experiment on the person of Louise, that the Stigmas, in her case at least, are not the work of a vesicant.

First of all, it must be remembered that the resemblance between the appearance of a blister and the appearance of the Stigmas is confined to one point only. In both cases a vesicle is formed by the separation of the surface skin, or *epidermis*, from the true skin below, the space between being filled with a watery liquid. The points of difference, on the other hand, are diverse and important.

(1) The vesicle of a blister is always surrounded by an inflamed ring, called an areola. This is wanting in the vesicle of the Stigmas. (2) Whenever the vesicle of a blister is rent open, and the watery liquid allowed to escape, though the under skin is laid bare, there is no flow of blood. In the Stigmas, bleeding at once begins when the vesicle opens. (3) If bleeding be artificially produced in the former case, as it may, by friction, it stops as soon as the friction ceases. In the Stigmas, the flow of blood continues for a good part of the day, sometimes for four and twenty hours at a time.

Still it might perhaps be argued, that there is possibly something in the peculiar temperament of Louise, which so modifies the action of a vesicant as to produce those extraordinary effects that are seen in the Stigmas. This supposition, groundless and extravagant as it would be, Doctor Lefebvre has taken the pains to refute beforehand, by the test of actual experiment. He produced a blister by artificial

means, side by side with one of the Stigmas; and while the Stigma bled profusely, not a drop of blood flowed from the blister.

This experiment was made on the twenty-seventh of November, 1868, in the presence of two distinguished members of the medical profession, Doctor Lecrinier of Fayt, and Doctor Severin of Braine. While all the Stigmas were bleeding copiously, Doctor Lefebvre applied liquid ammonia, a very powerful vesicant, to the back of the left hand, over a space equal in size to the stigmatic mark, and close beside it; taking care, however, to leave a clear band of sound skin between. At the end of twelve minutes, a well developed blister appeared, filled with a colourless liquid: and it may be observed in passing, that, though the process would, in ordinary circumstances, have been intensely painful, the ecstatic girl never exhibited the slightest trace of sensation.

The blister, thus formed, showed no tendency to burst open of itself: so Doctor Lefebvre, after waiting some time in vain, cut it open, and

removed the fragments of the cuticle, leaving the true skin bare. An artificial Stigma was thus produced beside the real one; situated on the same tissues, covering the same extent of surface, and exhibiting the same anatomical character. But there was this essential difference; the genuine Stigma bled, the artificial one did not. Doctor Lefebvre watched them closely for two hours and a half. During the whole of that time, the genuine Stigma continued to bleed freely. The artificial Stigma, on the other hand, gave out only a colourless liquid, which ceased to flow at the end of half an hour; and then the skin dried up.

After this, Doctor Lefebvre, with a view to force the blood by friction, rubbed a coarse linen cloth over the raw surface of the blistered skin. The cloth, during the process, was slightly stained with blood; but when the friction ceased, the blood refused to flow. From this experiment, then, it seems plain, that a blister produced by artificial means on the hand of Louise, is a blister and nothing more; and though it

resembles one particular phase in the development of the bleeding Stigmas, it offers no parallel to their most striking and characteristic features.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GLOVE TEST.

GLOVE TEST SUGGESTED BY MONSEIGNEUR PONCEAU—MOTHER OF LOUISE INDIGNANT—LOUISE MAKES NO OBJECTION—FIRST APPLICATION OF THE TEST, DECEMBER 1868—SECOND APPLICATION OF THE TEST, FEBRUARY 1869—SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT AGAINST FRAUD—CONCLUSION.

A STILL more decisive test, perhaps, because it holds good, not against one form of fraud only, but against every possible form, is that known as the experiment of the gloves. This test was suggested at an early period in the history of the case, by Monseigneur Ponceau, Vicar-General of the diocese of Tournay.

When the simple-hearted mother of Louise heard of it, she was very indignant, and gave vent to her feelings with a warmth, which, if it cannot be altogether defended, may well be excused. "Do they take me and my daughters for impostors," she said. "They think, perhaps, it is we that are making Louise bleed. Did *I* ever ask any one to come to see her? I ask only one thing, and that is, that they will leave us alone, and that no one shall ever put a foot into my house on a Friday again."

Louise, on her part, offered no objection to the experiment; as, indeed, she never did, to any test that was proposed. She only begged that they would not annoy her mother. It was agreed, therefore, to make the experiment at some time when the absence of the mother would afford a favorable opportunity. Such an opportunity occurred towards the close of the year 1868.

On Tuesday, the sixteenth of December, the hands of Louise having been first carefully examined, and found in their ordinary condition, a well-fitting leather glove was placed on each,

fastened tightly round the wrists, and sealed. A similar covering was drawn over the left foot, and fastened in the same way. The next day, Wednesday, these contrivances were examined by Doctor Lecrinier, Monsieur Dupont of Fayt, and the schoolmaster of Bois d'Haine, who satisfied themselves that the seals were intact, and that, without breaking them, there was no access to the stigmatic marks. For additional security, they removed the glove from one hand, and having ascertained that the skin showed no symptom of inflammation, no sign of a blister, they replaced it with the same precautions as before.

When Friday came, great care was taken, in the first instance, to make sure that the seals had not been tampered with. Then Doctor Spiltoir of Marchienne, in presence of eight witnesses, some of whom were Doctors, took off the two gloves. The Stigmas were bleeding profusely on the palms of both hands: those on the backs were not yet bleeding, but blisters were fully developed, and ready to break. As to

the feet, though one had been left free, and the other had been covered, both were found in exactly the same state. No blood was flowing, but blisters had been formed on both; and, after a little, both commenced to bleed.

This experiment of the gloves was made a second time, early in the following year. On Wednesday, the third of February, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Doctor Lecrinier, Monsieur Henri Bussin, and the Curé of Bois d'Haine, went to the house of Louise. They brought with them a pair of leather gloves, thick and strong. After they had made a close scrutiny of both hands, and found them quite free from any appearance of blister or inflammation, they got Louise to put on the gloves, which fitted very closely. Each glove was then fastened in the following manner: a string, attached to the glove, was passed five times round the wrist, and tied in a black knot; the projecting ends of the string were sealed; and the seals were enveloped in a small linen bag, to protect them against accident. The extremities of the

thumb and first finger of the right hand glove had been cut off beforehand, that Louise might be able to go on with her ordinary work.

At seven o'clock, on the following Friday morning, a distinguished party met together in the room of the Ecstatica. First, there was Doctor Lefebvre and Monseigneur Ponceau, Vicar-General of Tournay; next, the three persons named above, who had taken part in fastening on the gloves; and lastly, two other Physicians of some note, Doctor Moulaert of Bruges, and Doctor Mussely of Deynze. Every one present examined the apparatus on each hand, and expressed his conviction that the seals were intact; and further, that it was impossible to insert any instrument between either glove and the hand it covered.

When this investigation was over, Doctor Lefebvre cut the cords, and took off the gloves. They were full of blood. With some tepid water the Doctors washed the hands clean, and found them to present exactly the same appearance as they were wont to do on Fridays. The cuticle

had been raised and burst open: the under skin was laid bare: and blood was flowing copiously.

The whole argument against the supposition of fraud may be summed up in a few words. First, Louise could not produce in herself these extraordinary phenomena, however much she might wish and strive to do it. So far as we know at present, no human skill is able to produce such effects. The bleeding Stigmas cannot be imitated by the most accomplished surgeon: the ecstatic insensibility cannot be simulated by the most trained actor. It would be, therefore, most unreasonable to suppose that both are produced simultaneously, in her own person, by the untutored ingenuity of a peasant girl.

Again, if Louise were an impostor, she would have been detected long ago, if not by the prying curiosity of the crowd, at least by the severe scrutiny of sceptical and scientific men.

Thirdly, the girl had no motive which could

induce her to devise and carry out so difficult and painful a fraud. Not vanity; for she loves solitude and obscurity. Not cupidity; for she spurns money.

Besides these general considerations, we have special experiments devised for the express purpose of detecting fraud, if it existed. First, there is the experiment of the vesicant, or blistering preparation. A vesicant is the only appliance, known in surgery or medicine, capable of producing effects at all resembling the Stigmas of Louise. Yet a vesicant has been tried on the back of her hand, under the most favourable circumstances, and has completely failed. It produced simply a blister, and not a bleeding Stigma.

Next, there is the experiment of the gloves. The hands of Louise were completely covered up, for two or three days, so as to shut out the possibility of applying any artificial means whatever, for the purpose of drawing blood. And yet, when Friday came, the blood flowed as usual. It is plain, then, that the phenomena

witnessed in Louise are not the result of artifice, but are real and genuine wonders.

If genuine, they are certainly supernatural. No doubt, some people, who do not believe anything to be supernatural, have tried to persuade themselves, and others, that these singular prodigies are a disease, like measles or scarlatina: with this difference only, that the disease of Louise Lateau is one of rather rare occurrence; hers being, in fact, the first case of the kind which has been thoroughly investigated by medical men, and entered on the records of science.

Doctor Lefebvre has taken a vast amount of trouble to refute this hypothesis. He has gone over a long list of diseases,—common diseases, and extraordinary diseases, and what are called rare cases of disease,—and he has shown, with great learning and elaborate care, that there is not the smallest foundation, in medical science, for the supposition that these phenomena are, in any true sense of the word, a disease.

This argument I do not purpose to discuss; partly because I do not possess sufficient know-

ledge of the various diseases enumerated by Doctor Lefebvre, and partly because I consider the argument unnecessary. There are very few, I believe, who while admitting the phenomena to be genuine, will yet maintain that they are natural. If I have succeeded in showing that there is no imposture, I am quite content to leave the question of disease to the instinctive judgment and good sense of my readers.

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